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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5967
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4317
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1911
RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4313
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3409
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8397
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5875
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0585
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2671
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000279

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PTER MOPS CE

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES SRI LANKAN JUSTICE SECRETARY ON
CHILD SOLDIERS

REF: A. SECSTATE 19505
 1B. COLOMBO 00213

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On March 17, Ambassador and DCM met the
Secretary to the Ministry of Justice Suhada Gamalath to urge

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that the GSL, in the face of restrictions on U.S. Foreign
Military Financing to Sri Lanka (ref A), take swift and
effective measures to demobilize and rehabilitate child
soldiers in government-backed paramilitaries. Gamalath was
receptive to our arguments, promising to meet with Pillaiyan
to urge him to order the release of TMVP child soldiers.
Gamalath's committee on child soldiers has already taken some
modest steps, but we believe that without continued strong
pressure to end the TMVP's use of child soldiers, the
committee by itself is unlikely to be able to produce timely
results. Embassy will continue to exert pressure on the GSL
at all levels to take prompt action to release the TMVP's
children under arms. End summary.

12. (C) Secretary Gamalath chairs the GSL's committee on
child soldiers that was formed in August 2007, and his
Ministry is charged with enforcing the GSL's zero tolerance
policy on child soldiers. In this initial meeting,
Ambassador emphasized that U.S. interest in child soldiers in
Sri Lanka is both humanitarian and practical, as we want to
continue our military assistance to the GSL. To do so, the
GSL must show clear progress. Secretary Gamalath readily
acknowledged the use of child soldiers by
government-supported armed groups as a serious matter. He
stressed that the GSL needs an institutionalized structure,
with the support of NGOs, to gather information and monitor
what happens to child soldiers after their demobilization.
Gamalath wants to pursue a holistic rehabilitation and
reintegration program including vocational training and
psychosocial support. However, he admitted that the GSL has
limited resources, especially in psychosocial services, and
would welcome international help.

¶3. (C) Ambassador responded that the key missing ingredient is orders from Pillaiyan to stop recruitment of and release all child soldiers. (Note: Pillaiyan is the new head of the TMVP, the armed paramilitary that swept recent elections in the east. He replaced Col. Karuna Amman, who is now serving a sentence for immigration violations in the UK.) Ambassador strongly urged Gamalath to meet with Pillaiyan to insist on this. Gamalath agreed, promising to do so within a month. Ambassador urged him to pursue the meeting sooner. Ambassador noted that Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa has stated he wants to demobilize all child soldiers, and stressed that now that the TMVP is a political party, it must agree to release the child soldiers it is using.

Modest Actions Taken by GSL

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador asked what mechanisms are in place for demobilization and rehabilitation. Gamalath explained that the GSL refers released child soldiers to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission for a hearing, summons the parents to ensure the child's subsequent safety, then sends the child home with the parents. Gamalath said some children receive vocational training, but he wants to start psychological support. Gamalath pointed out a recent change in the Penal Code, stipulating that any person convicted of engaging or recruiting child soldiers is liable to imprisonment not exceeding thirty years and to a fine. Gamalath noted that the GSL conducts meetings and awareness programs for security forces, some of whom are not aware of the special sensitivity that should be shown when dealing with children in armed

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conflict.

¶5. (C) When DCM asked Gamalath what he would see as "effective means" (as specified in Section 699C of the FY08 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act) that the GSL could take to address the issue, Gamalath invited the Ambassador and DCM to visit him again in four weeks. He said the committee has plans to return to Batticaloa, and that a recently opened rehabilitation center in Ambepussa, near Kandy, will be better organized. Gamalath made no mention of the release of children, however.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Secretary Gamalath struck us as a conscientious civil servant who is genuine about GSL efforts to demobilize and rehabilitate child soldiers. His committee on child soldiers has taken some modest steps, but we believe that without continued strong pressure to end the TMVP's use of child soldiers, the committee is unlikely to produce timely results. Gamalath at times appeared to answer questions by referring to programs that involve LTTE rather than TMVP child soldiers, indicating that the GSL may have a tendency to see this problem more in terms of the LTTE than of the TMVP. Embassy will continue to stress that we need to see tangible progress on child soldiers in government-backed paramilitaries - not just enhancements of existing programs for former LTTE child soldiers. Septel will report on Ambassador's March 18 meeting with Sri Lankan Army Commander Fonseka who promised to help end the practice of child soldiers by paramilitaries.

BLAKE